

Rogers, Douglas, *The Depth of Russia. Oil, Power and Culture after Socialism*. Ithaca, NY & London: Cornell University Press, 2015, xix + 370pp., £18.95/\$27.95 p/b.

Choosing Perm (Пермь [p'ɛr'm]) region for constructing anthropological interpretation of the post-Soviet history appears opportune. Hardly any proxy could capture better the gist of the cultural renovation and the distribution and clashes of powers in a contemporary Russia that is seen by many as a perversely reforming society addicted to oil.

In the three parts of the book have been uncovered different facets of the post-Soviet transformation of the region that has profound relations and considerable dependence on oil industry. The region-focused cases prototype the governance of social modernisation, explain the logic of the developmental path and mental paradigm dominant in the country that orients perceptions and expectations in modern Russia.

A substantial Introduction of 30 pages conveniently enlightens the reader on the nuances, building blocks and pitfalls of the oil-dominated developmental path. It helpfully contextualises this path in the Russian realities and aspirations to modernise. It metaphorically links the depth of the oil deposits to the depth of penetration of oil-related mentality into societal history, economic configuration and politics, identity and cultural authenticity. It explains how and why oil was behind the basic processes of long-term formation of the state, corporate sector and citizenship. Also, the useful insights are offered into the fieldwork and the evidence gathering process that support the arguments and observations presented in the book.

Three chapters form Part One of the book. Chapter 1 acts as an introduction to the “socialist oil complex” (p.37) as it has been establishing through the history of the Soviet period from the early days and up to today’s vintage point of post-communist transition. It highlights all significant elements and the spectre of relations existed within and around this complex from production to ecological activism. By covering the decades of the oil history in the region with a help of some focused examples, the author concludes that the socialist oil complex is profoundly different from the capitalist ones in terms of its role in forming human, cultural, economic social configuration and that it acts as a nourishment of political powers. Notably, through the assessment of the evidence, the cumbersome nature of the centrally planned system is shown as being responsible for the formation of the Russian “second economy”, of which informality transacted through favours have become an important factor in the distribution of powers.

In Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, the narrative develops along the unfolding of the process that led to the formation of the new organisations and supply chains in the post-communist oil industry. This embraces enterprise restructuring, monetisation of transactions and the general marketization of the oil sector. An illuminating explanation of the “Lukoilization” of the region is given here. The meticulously presented evidence documents the rise and the very foundations of the might of the oil giant *Lukoil*.

Part two of the book is devoted to the investigation of the state (Chapter 4) and corporate (Chapter 5) entanglement during the years when both went through their formative age and maturation. The trail of the evidence points out that the new practices of the state building opened up an entire new state-corporate field (p.165), of which the scientific analysis is still pending. The observations demonstrate that in spite of the organisational parting of the ways between state and oil companies, the overall state-corporate field tended to coalesce around social and cultural projects. This is seen as an indicator of that under the CSR banners the oil corporations took on para-statal functions and helped with reviving the history of the Soviet company towns (p.189). However, what is new, as the

book shows, is that now the companies play much more direct and engaged role in governance (p.208).

Next three chapters that form Part Three of the book look at the “transmutation of oil into cultural spectacles” (p.214). They show how producing oil translates into producing culture and history via monetised social relations. The central conclusion is that the impact of the oil industry on the formation of the national identity has a regional rather than national scope (p.248), while the legacy of the regional entrepreneurial and success enters the records of the national history. Rogers finds that in Russia, uniquely, the hydrocarbon materiality is prominently incarnated in social function of the energy sector, a phenomenon not reported elsewhere in the world (p.266), as it is possibly associated with the Soviet legacy. The chapters provide very rich factual material and numerous examples of the cultural projects financed with oil money that have been shaping the social landscape and the growth of the civic society as the kernels of the social capital. The oil money, as it appears, encouraged the new sources of the cultural formation beyond the Soviet historical tradition of the state-stimulated, ideologically confined, and not competitive in the outlook culture.

The book ends without a concluding chapter. Although this might be justifiable from the point of view of consistency with the design of other chapters, it would be helpful to summarise the main points and findings at least to assure the reader that one’s understanding and the interpretation of the material is consistent with the intentions and aspiration of the author.

In the same vein, it seems that Preface does not sell the book exceptionally well to a scholarly reader interested in Russia with its all obligatory post-Cold War giveaways of mentioning Gulag, calling Soviet Army as Red Army, some conjectures on the closed city of Perm, referring to it as *glubinka* (a retarded provincial place). Although most Russian in the Soviet times would have known about the importance and industrial might of the Ural industrial clusters.

The book offers a scrupulous nearly encyclopaedic scholarly account on the formation of the socialist oil complex and its by-products in one of the industrial regions of Russia. Paradoxically, exactly because of such a detailed scrutiny the book might be limiting its appeal to a wider professional groups where the more substantial, comparatively to the factual richness, reflective commentary is appreciated.

Olga Kuznetsova

Manchester Metropolitan University, UK